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THE IRISH VOTE IN THE PENDING PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION.

IN our Presidential contests, wherein the numerical strength of the two great parties is almost evenly balanced at the polls, every agency that is calculated to effect the result is naturally a matter of keen interest and appreciation. The movement going on in what is called the "Irish vote," is now watched by the political leaders with no little anxiety. This vote, which is an important factor in all the principal States of the Union, is potent, especially in the doubtful States of New York, New Jersey, and Connecticut. An analysis of the vote in New York State alone, in this connection, will be instructive. According to the official Legislative Manual for 1887, the total number of votes in this State, based on the census of 1875, was 1,141,462 ; native voters, 747,280, and naturalized voters, 394,182. In the county of Kings the native voters counted 54,452, and the naturalized voters 60,062; in New York County the native voters were 90,973, and the naturalized voters 141,179. Here we see that in 1875 the naturalized voters in New York State numbered about one-third of the total vote, and in the two principal cities of the State the naturalized voters numbered considerably more than one-half the total vote of New York and Brooklyn.

The relative strength of the naturalized vote to-day is certainly not less than it was in 1875. What proportion the Irish vote holds to the total naturalized vote in New York State can only be conjectured, but that it is very large goes without saying. With the "Irish vote" should be counted a large number of Irish-Americans born in this country, who are officially enumerated with the native voters, so that the actual political force of this element is even greater than the figures quoted would indicate; and the like is true of the Germans, though not of the Poles,

Italians, or Scandinavians—elements which are in their first generation in America.

The Irish vote, as is generally known, has been until recently a solid phalanx and a cabled annex to the Democratic party, the exceptional Irish Republican to be found here and there only the more sharply denoting the rule. This may not be a cause for congratulation, but we are now in the region of practical politics and have to do with facts. That the elements constituting the Irish vote should on occasions feel called upon to express themselves distinctively respecting political measures and movements, calculated to affect interests common to them as men of the same race or religious faith, is not unnatural. In this respect the Irish are not unlike other people. But why the Irish vote should ever have been a solid vote, and why it should have been so long held as the permanent asset of the Democratic party, is a question the answer to which, if not altogether satisfactory, would form a most interesting chapter in a work devoted to the curiosities of American politics.

Any political force in this country which is organized, or held intact, on a racial or religious basis is un-American; and any solid vote which wears even the semblance of foreign complexion is intolerable. This country is not a confederation of colonies nor a conglomeration of alien clans. It is a nation, with the organic life and spirit of a nation; and it is most desirable that all the elements of our population should, as speedily as circumstances will allow, assimilate themselves to the distinctive American type. This national unity does not, of course, imply agreement in all political views. Differences there will be and must be. But American citizens ought to think and act in American affairs as Americans, and not as Irishmen, or Germans, or Englishmen. Irishmen, and Germans, and Englishmen, if they put themselves forward as such, must be regarded as foreigners, and foreigners should have nothing to do with American affairs.

I do not want to pander to vulgar prejudice. I have no respect for that loud and offensive Americanism which, whilst it assumes to be the exclusive guardian of all national interests, is itself too often the offspring of race and religious bigotry. The spurious patriotism which forever cant about the “foreigner” is itself foreign to the spirit of true Americanism. He who would deny the claims of blood is unnatural, and loyalty to the genius

of American nationality enjoins nothing that is repugnant to nature or manhood. My contention is that Americans of Irish birth ought to be just to themselves, as they are loyal to their adopted country, and justice to themselves requires that they should, like other Americans, agree to disagree in politics. This is the right thing to do, and the right thing will be found the wise thing also.

Now, Irish-Americans were not just to themselves so long as they were a solid vote. The most intensely American element of the population, they suffered themselves to appear in a semi-alien character ; loving liberty, they were made to assume an attitude of seeming hostility to the friends of human freedom ; the victims of British tyranny and avarice, Irishmen in America became the strong, blind, steadfast supporters of British free trade, which laid the industries of Ireland in ruin, and forced her children to seek bread and a home beyond the sea ! Into these inconsistencies they were led by a superstitious allegiance to party management.

This anomalous position which the Irish vote has held is explained, if it cannot be justified, by historical causes which are no longer operative. The "Alien Law," which was passed during the administration of John Adams, was one of those causes. That law, which enabled the President at pleasure to order any alien he might deem "dangerous" to quit the country, was aimed specially at French refugees and Irish revolutionists. It was in the year 1798. The Irish Rebellion had failed. Thomas Addis Emmet and Dr. McNevin (whose monuments now ornament the front of St. Paul's Church, Broadway), with other leaders of the United Irishmen who were confined in Fort George, Scotland, received intimation from the British Government that they would be given their freedom on condition that they would leave the British dominions never to return. The condition was accepted. Rufus King then represented the United States at the Court of St. James, and to him the Irish patriots applied for passports to America. Those passports Mr. King, who was known to sympathize with the views of President Adams, declined to grant. Mr. Adams represented the Federalist party. The party in opposition was headed by Thomas Jefferson. (Curiously enough the Jeffersonian Democracy of that day was known as the Republican party.) When Mr. Marsden, the English Under-Secretary, informed Mr. Emmet and his com-

panions of Mr. King's unwillingness that they should emigrate to the United States, the Englishman suggestively remarked: "Perhaps Mr. King does not desire to have more Republicans in America!" Mr. King's refusal, however, had quite the contrary effect, and "More Republicans in America," the offspring of his ungenerous action and the truckling policy of his master, stood up to be counted. The policy of President Adams alienated the Irish and killed the Federalist party. From that time forth the Irish vote was cast solidly with the Democracy.

Three-score and eight years roll by. Another unsuccessful rebellion is recorded in Ireland. An American citizen of Irish birth, a soldier in our own Union war, is sentenced to death in England, and goes to the scaffold protesting his innocence. He charges that he is basely betrayed and cruelly abandoned to his fate by the American minister then in England, and the official correspondence sustains the terrible charge. That minister was Charles Francis Adams, a lineal descendant of John Adams. Charles Francis Adams returns to America, is put in nomination for Governor of Massachusetts by the Democracy of that State, is voted for by Irish Democrats, and those Irishmen who vote against him are denounced as traitors!

In the fifties the spirit of Nativism swept over Massachusetts, and Gardiner, an avowed Know-Nothing, was elected Governor of the State. The Montgomery Guards, an Irish-American military body, was disbanded, and other affronts were put upon men of the Irish race and the Catholic faith. The Republican party was then in its incipiency, and as soon as it was organized Massachusetts took her place in the column of Republican States. This fact, read in the light of preceding events, prejudiced the Republican party in the minds of adopted citizens; and for years after demagogues on the Democratic stump, and to hold the Irish vote in the Democratic party, sought to identify Republicanism with Know-Nothingism—tried to make the masses believe that the Republican party was but a new cover for the old proscriptive organization. The truth is that, while the Democratic and Republican parties, as such, were then as now free from the charge of bigotry, both Democrats and Republicans were tainted more or less with Know-Nothingism, and Democrats more so. The insults offered to Catholics and Irishmen in the city of Boston were shameful, but they paled before the anti-Catholic and

anti-Irish outrages perpetrated in Baltimore, Louisville and New Orleans. In 1856, when the Native-American party put a national ticket in nomination, Maine cast but three per cent. of her popular vote for the Know-Nothing candidates, while Virginia cast forty-seven per cent. of her popular vote for them, and Maryland, which has been ever anti-Republican, gave to the Know-Nothing nominees its entire electoral vote. What is the spirit that has actuated *Harper's Weekly*, the *New York Times*, *Puck*, and the *Evening Post*, if it is not the Know-Nothing spirit? And this spirit, which by the genius of the American system has been exorcised out of the Republican body, now dominates the Cleveland Democracy, and sorely torments its victims.

I am not arraigning the Democratic party for its sins of commission or omission, nor do I hold it responsible for the acts or words of individuals affiliated with it. There are, as is to be expected, narrow-minded men in both parties; but the charge of bigotry against either political organization is not tenable, and Irish Democratic politicians who in the past gave currency to the fiction that one-half the American people were the sworn foes of Irishmen and Catholics were engaged in very small work, of which, it is to be hoped, those politicians are now ashamed.

With the progress of education, and in the light of the knowledge of the facts here presented, the Irish vote, once solid, is now in a state of solution. Irish-Americans of to-day are practical and inquiring. They are not to be amused by fairy tales; they ask what is the living issue of the day, and the man or the party that tries to frighten them with the ghost of Know-Nothingism insults their intelligence and will in turn receive their contempt. The issue of to-day is the Tariff. It is the American system versus the British Colonial system. The Irish instinctively are Protectionists. Nineteen-twentieths of them are workingmen, and, looking at the matter as a question of wages, they very naturally object to Free Trade. Knowing this, the Democratic politicians, from Grover Cleveland down, are at pains to make the working people believe that Free Trade is beside the issue; but Mr. Henry George and every honest free trader in the land say it is a step in that direction; and the English press, which are concerned about our national contest only in so far as the result may affect English interests, hail Cleveland's policy with cheers, and hope and pray for his success. The fact that the

Lion and Unicorn have taken the stump for Cleveland and Thurman is not calculated to hurt Harrison and Morton in the estimation of the Irish, who will, I promise, give a good account of themselves in the pending Presidential election.

PATRICK FORD.